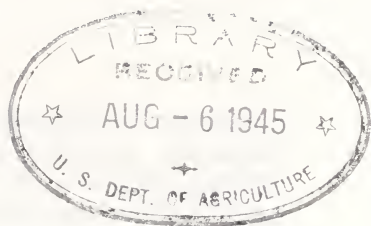


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The Scope of Land Use Planning

LAND USE planning committees, when they have begun to study local land use conditions and to seek ways of improving these conditions, have found that their job has many sides. By its very nature, this work has caused the committees to deal with many fields they had not counted as part of the job, as well as with new ways of getting at the roots of local ills.

This is because land use planning involves study of and action upon nearly every phase of community life. It does not deal simply with land or physical resources. In reality, it is planning for the welfare of the people and their institutions, community by community, with land use acting as a base from which to work.

Committee members have early found that land use planning cannot be separated from planning for better road systems, for the future of rural youth, for protection of forests against fire, for flood protection, for better health facilities, for more equitable tax systems. Planning for these things is a vital part of all land use planning.

Many Factors Affect Way Land is Used.

The way land is used reaches out to touch the lives of everyone in the community. It colors every part of community existence. In turn, all the conditions and forces that are at work in the community react upon the use made of land. For instance, the use of land determines in part the kind of incomes the people have, the standard of living they can maintain, and the education they can give their

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children. It also affects the location and adequacy of roads, markets, schools, and other public services. It affects credit policies in the area, relief costs, prices, the system of farm tenure, and the opportunities for people there to get jobs. Then, in turn, each of these conditions is among the reasons why land is used in the present way.

The field of planning, then, is very broad. It is broader than the program of any single agency. It includes planning for action that can be obtained upon a purely local basis, without the help of public agencies. It also involves planning for action that requires the help of State and national agencies whose work affects agriculture.

Congress has set up a number of agencies in the United States Department of Agriculture, in recent years, to deal with many agricultural problems and conditions.

The programs of many of these agencies center largely around adjustments in the use of land. It is natural, therefore, that land use planning committees want to cooperate closely with these agencies, for through them many problems can be solved that could not be attacked effectively through individual or group efforts alone. Furthermore, farmers on the committees are benefiting from the advice and assistance provided by agricultural technicians and program administrators. These services have repeatedly proved useful in arriving at practicable plans that lead to action.

How Problems Were Attacked in One County.

Ward County, in North Dakota, offers a good example of the usefulness of the work of county planning committees. The community committees here began their work through discussion and study meetings, where they made land use maps and classified various areas as to their suitability or unsuitability for arable farming. The community maps were then brought together by the county committee and, after frequent discussions between the various committees, were assembled into a single map for the county. One of the features of the work in Ward County is that local, State, and Federal action agencies were asked, in the early stages of the planning work, to make suggestions whenever they thought the committee should reconsider any of its decisions.

Because of drought and other factors, many farms in Ward County are tax-delinquent, and some have reverted to the county for nonpayment of taxes. The financial condition of

the county and township governments reflects these misfortunes. After analyzing its land use problems, the land use planning committee made a number of suggestions to local, State, and Department of Agriculture agencies. These suggestions were put in the form of recommendations pointing out to those agencies the need for modifying their programs to fit local needs. The recommendations were aimed at obtaining better land use in some parts of the county, and discouraging undesirable land uses and farm practices in other parts.

Several recommendations were made to the Agricultural Adjustment Administration, and they have already been approved. The Farm Security Administration, responding to recommendations, has agreed to make payments to the county in lieu of taxes on the resettlement land it is administering there. That agency will help other farmers by demonstrating farming practices, developed jointly with its clients, that are in conformity with plans of the committees, thus aiding to bring about another type of land use adjustments. The Farm Credit Administration is cooperating, too, and at the committee's request is considering a plan for encouraging the use of long-term leases on the farms of the county. This activity can have an important effect in bringing about better land use. A suggestion that F. C. A. take part in a coordinated educational program to acquaint farmers with the nature and value of farmer cooperatives is now under discussion.

Local and State Officials Cooperate.

Local farmer organizations as well as township, county, and State officials were quick to catch the spirit of cooperative planning. They worked closely with the planning committee in developing plans for adjusting farm-land assessments in light of the committee's land classification, and for establishing recreational areas on tax-reverted land. They cooperated in making plans for rental arrangements on tax-deeded land, and in seeking a better basis for distributing relief costs within the county. A good land-classification map, it is being demonstrated, can be an important tool for locating serious relief conditions.

The Ward County committee is now exploring the possibility and practicality of developing plans to disorganize a certain township. Related adjustments, such as the reorganization of schools and the correction of land-transfer practices which have caused a loss in the tax base, must be

reckoned with as part and parcel of the whole adjustment. All of these adjustments must be based upon the way people use their land, both in the present and in the future.

Another example is given by the work in Belknap County, in New Hampshire. Here the planning committee not only dealt with problems in the use of land, but also gave much thought to the road situation in the county. Parts of the older network of roads in the county no longer served the original purposes of the roads, for farming areas and population centers in the county have been shifting for nearly a century.

Subcommittee For Road Problems.

A group of members on the county planning committee organized themselves into a subcommittee, just to work on the problem of roads. Laboring long and hard, the members have cooperated closely with State and Federal highway officials in developing plans for eventual abandonment of certain roads that can be eliminated without seriously affecting the use of resources. In its land use plans, the committee is taking into account the future uses for land along any roads that may be discontinued. It has taken into account the number of older people in the county, and the possible effects of their advancing age upon the use of land and public services. It is studying the possibility of distributing the costs of roads more evenly, and of getting greater efficiency in road management.

To deal with problems more directly connected with land use, the committee has outlined a 10-year program for improving pastures and woodlots. Cooperating in this new program are the Extension Service, Agricultural Adjustment Administration, Soil Conservation Service, Farm Security Administration, Forest Service, and the State Agricultural Experiment Station.

The A. A. A. is to help in the 10-year program by making payments to farmers for specified practices on pastures and woodlots that will speed up their development and profitable use.

The S. C. S. is to help by testing new methods of clearing brush and hardhack from abandoned or idle farm land, so that pasture improvements can be speeded up and pastures made more productive.

The Forest Service will assist actively in the work of woodlot improvement, which is necessary to put agriculture in the county upon a sounder base.

Results Based on Land-Settlement Study.

Spokane County, in Washington, provides another example. This county is in the path of migrants from the northern drought areas, many of whom have settled on farms that are too small or too poor to give them a satisfactory living. As a step toward dealing with the complex land problems that have arisen, the county committee asked the State experiment station to study the land-settlement possibilities of the county. The results of this study were used by the planning committee in recommendations for guiding new settlement, as well as for adjusting the sizes of farms.

Thus, land use planning is already beginning to make itself felt in terms of real and vital service to the public. The county commissioners here are refusing to sell tax-reverted land in the areas that the land use planning committee has marked out as unsuited to farming. Future settlers can take advantage of this advice and be forewarned, thus reducing the possibility that they will later be compelled, like former owners of the same land, to apply for public relief because their farms wouldn't "pay out." Spokane County presents a case in which farmers and experts came to a mutual agreement as to the types of farms that wouldn't pay out in certain areas. This agreement has resulted in action by the county commissioners.

The Farm Security Administration is working with the county committee on the problem of adjusting sizes of farms and has agreed to make a limited number of loans for clearing stumps from the land. Loans for this purpose are to be made only in areas that are designated by the planning committee as suitable for agriculture.

Proposal for Aid to Delinquent Borrowers.

Credit problems have come in for consideration. The Federal Land Bank and the F. S. A. now have before them a proposal that they cooperate in assisting delinquent land-bank borrowers, and the local officials of these agencies who are working with the planning committee, in arranging a study of delinquent loans, this study to furnish a basis for action.

Both the F. C. A. and the F. S. A. have agreed to use the county land use classification map as a guide to assist them in making new loans in conformity with the land use plans and goals set up by the committee.

These are merely samples of land use matters of concern to county committees. All planning committees are interested in developing land use plans, on the basis of which they can

work out agreements with public agencies for coordinating programs in their particular areas. Some committees have centered their plans around improving land and water use. Accordingly, they have emphasized recommendations for controlling soil erosion and encouraging conservation practices, or achieving better water utilization, or encouraging deferred grazing and other needed practices on depleted range land.

Plans Cover Wide Range of Land Use Questions.

Plans of some counties have focused on adjustments requiring major changes in land use such as the retiring of submarginal farm land into forest uses, draining of land where needed, or creation of recreational and wildlife areas on land best suited to those purposes. Other committees have stressed the need for controlling the use of publicly owned land, and have given major attention to policies for managing tax-reverted land.

Some committees have found their most pressing problems were those of local government, caused by the unwise use of land, and have first started to work on problems of tax equalization, or reorganization of rural school systems, or adjustments in the rehabilitation program, or increasing the usefulness of credit facilities. Still others have placed emphasis directly upon the human problems of financial and medical aid to low-income families. Better facilities to improve health and safety conditions for school children have been among the aims outlined by several committees.

The questions county committees are interested in have been wide and varied. The committees have stimulated action toward better land use and farming practices on the part of individual farmers. Committee members have worked together to solve local problems through voluntary group action. Then, by working with local and State governmental officials, they have given valuable assistance to public agencies through their practical suggestions and advice on administrative policy. They have suggested how public programs could be more closely adapted to local conditions and special problems. They have been remarkably successful in pointing out how various public programs in their areas should be fitted together so as to prevent conflicts in their local operations.

Cooperation is Essential in Developing Plans.

The effectiveness of land use planning depends always upon the way the farmers, the technicians, and the program

administrators cooperate in developing representative and usable plans for local areas. What has already been accomplished, however, does more than show what can be done, for it gives a fair indication of what each county committee may reasonably expect to be accomplishing at a very early date. As planning committees gain more experience, they will be even more successful in pointing out how the various State and Federal programs can be made more applicable to the conditions within each county. Their effectiveness will grow as the spirit of cooperation grows between the farmers, the technicians, and the administrators.

Each committee's service to its State as a part of a great democracy will be proportionate to the effort it makes to obtain truly representative statements of the needs of the people. Planning, if carried on democratically, will open up many new fields of inquiry, and show new ways of attacking all kinds of problems connected with the happiness and prosperity of those people who depend on the land.

Previous Publications in this County Planning Series:

No. 1.—County Land Use Planning.

No. 2.—Membership of Land Use Planning Committees.

No. 3.—The Land Use Planning Organization.

